

Sustainable soil management to unleash soil biodiversity potential and increase environmental, economic and social well-being

25



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INNOVATION TAKES CENTER STAGE: ANNUAL HORIZON 2020 CONSORTIUM MEETING IN ATH TO HIGHLIGHT MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS



Athens, Greece - The SOILGUARD project successfully completed its Annual Consortium Meeting in Athens, Greece. The event, held in collaboration with the National Observatory of Athens (NOA) and the Wireless Innovation in Natural and Green Services (WINGS) consortium, marked a significant milestone for the SOILGUARD project.

Researchers, stakeholders, and experts gathered to discuss progress and future plans during the meeting. Representatives from 25 European and international organisations came together for a meeting that provided an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the substantial progress made thus far and allowed for the identification and resolution of any challenges encountered, setting the stage for another year of prosperity.

The event began with welcoming remarks from NOA and WINGS, followed by updates from the coordinating organisation, LEITAT. SOILGUARD also partnered with the IUCN for an online EU Green Week event highlighting the importance of soil biodiversity conservation. During the panel discussion, Mirco Barbero from the Directorate-General for Environment of the European Commission aptly stated, "Soils are a business partner," underscoring soils' vital role in our economic and societal well-being. This insightful remark resonated with the overall theme of the discussion, highlighting the immense potential of soil biodiversity to drive positive impacts on the environment, economy, and society.

Key updates were shared on various work packages. WP1, focusing on the SOILGUARD Network of Knowledge, updated and approved the Soil Biodiversity and Wellbeing Framework and Strategic Plan. WP2 discussed establishing 234 sampling sites, quantifying degradation levels, and challenges related to non-EU soils and questionnaires. WP3 covered sample collection, preparation, shipping, and analysis of soil biodiversity and multifunctionality, along with field trial simulations.

Dr Charalampos Kontoes from NOA/BEYOND delivered a welcoming speech on day two. WP4 presented progress in quantifying the economic and socio-cultural value of Nature's Contributions to People. WP5 provided updates on evidence chains and the development of the SOILGUARD app. WP6 shared insights on pan-European policies and international frameworks for soil biodiversity.

Overall, SOILGUARD's third year holds great promise as the project strives to unleash soil biodiversity and generate positive impacts on the environment, economy, and society. The project aims to enhance biodiversity, bolster agricultural productivity, and safeguard valuable land by prioritising soil health. This holistic approach will yield environmental benefits like climate change mitigation and water filtration and foster economic efficiency by reducing input costs and ensuring long-term soil fertility.

Through its comprehensive efforts, SOILGUARD is paving the way towards a more resilient and sustainable future by emphasising the significance of sustainable soil management.



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